



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

May 8, 2018

Anand Vadapalli
President and Chief Executive Officer
Alaska Communications Systems Group, Inc.
600 Telephone Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99503

Dear Mr. Vadapalli:

As the son of two doctors in rural Kansas, I understand how connectivity can play a transformative role in the provision of medical care. I recall my father driving many miles at times to see patients in remote areas. Having seen how telemedicine is being used to improve the well-being of rural Americans, I support the Universal Service Fund's rural healthcare program and its important mission to serve communities in need throughout the United States. I know that Alaska Communications supports the mission of rural healthcare providers as well.

That's why I was so disheartened to hear this past week that Alaska Communications, because of questions about its compliance with Commission rules, is reconsidering its participation in the Fund's Telecommunications Program, a program that is key to providing remote Alaskan villages with telecommunications services. As such, I write to remind you of your company's obligations under the Communications Act and our rules.

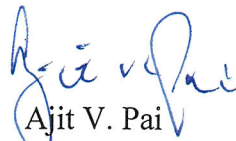
First, the Act makes clear that Alaska Communications *must* continue to provide service to the rural healthcare providers it serves upon a bona fide request for service. *See* 47 U.S.C. § 254(h)(1)(A) ("A telecommunications carrier shall, upon receiving a bona fide request, provide telecommunications services which are necessary for the provision of health care services in a State . . ."). Our rules confirm this requirement, and spell out the metes and bounds of such a bona fide request. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.615(b)–(d). Notably, telecommunications carriers like Alaska Communications must provide the supported service upon bona fide request even if they do not choose to bid for a rural healthcare provider's business. To put it another way, Alaska Communications *may not* deny or cut off service to any of its existing rural healthcare provider customers.

Second, the Act and our rules make clear that Alaska Communications *must not* charge rural healthcare providers a rate higher than the urban rate. *See* 47 U.S.C. § 254(h)(1)(A); 47 C.F.R. § 54.615(b) ("[A] telecommunications carrier shall provide the service at a rate no higher than the urban rate . . ."). In other words, federal law prohibits Alaska Communications from charging rural healthcare providers the rural rate or for the unpaid balance that Alaska Communications hopes to receive from the Universal Service Fund. Accordingly, Alaska Communications *may not* deny or cut off service to any of its existing rural healthcare provider customers for lack of payment of any charge higher than the urban rate.

I would also remind you that, as a telecommunications carrier offering telecommunications services to rural healthcare providers, Alaska Communications is prohibited from engaging in unjust and unreasonable practices or from discontinuing service to a community without prior Commission approval.

Thank you for Alaska Communications' continued service to healthcare providers in some of the most remote corners of our nation. Closing the digital divide remains my top priority, and your work to keep these communities connected is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Ajit V. Pai